

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading.
3. Write a 1+ page reflection

A Divided Ukraine

Source: CNN.com Feb 27, 2014

Ukraine is beset by political turmoil the likes of which it hasn't seen in almost a decade. What started as protests over the handling of a trade pact with the European Union escalated to the ousting of the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich. A new government has been installed in Kiev, the capital. Ukraine, the biggest frontier nation separating Russia and the European Union, is sometimes considered a pawn between Russia and the West.

OK, so what's happening in Ukraine today?

A lot. To be brief, Ukraine's ousted President sounded pretty defiant talking to reporters from Russia. He fled Ukraine days ago but insisted that he remained the legitimate elected leader and that he would not give up. In Crimea, a pro-Russian region of southern Ukraine, armed men in military uniforms alarmed Ukrainian officials by showing up suddenly outside two airports in the region.

Though it is an alarming development, that in and of itself doesn't seem to be quite the "armed invasion" Interior Minister Arsen Avakov suggested it was. The camo-clad squads showed up toting automatic weapons outside the main airport in the regional capital, Simferopol, as well as at a joint military-civilian airport near Russia's big military base in Sevastopol. They didn't seem to do much but look tough. Later, Ukrainian officials said they were able to stop the squads from taking over the airports without using any weapons.

OK, remind me again how the tension in Ukraine all got started?

The short version is that Ukraine has long been split between folks who look West toward Europe and those who tend to lean East toward Russia. Last year, now-ousted President Viktor Yanukovich decided to scrap a European trade deal that promised long-term rewards in favor of a pile of quick cash offered up by Russia. The pivot toward Russia set off protests by the pro-European crowd that climaxed in deadly clashes with security forces last week. Dozens died before a European-brokered peace deal ended the fighting. But Yanukovich fled before the deal could all be implemented, first to pro-Russian strongholds in Ukraine, then finally to Russia.

What did the ousted President say today? And why is he in Russia?

Pretty much this: I'm still president. I had to leave Ukraine because people kept trying to kill me. And "Western powers" are to blame for all of this chaos. He also said that he won't ask Russian President Vladimir Putin for military muscle to help restore him to power, and seemed to reject talk of splitting up Ukraine into pro-European and pro-Russian halves.

So who's in charge in Ukraine and what are they doing about all this?

Ukraine's Parliament says it's running things. Lawmakers have named an interim president, started to set up a new government and called elections for May. They've also been talking tough to Russia about keeping its military on its leash and avoiding anything that seems provocative.

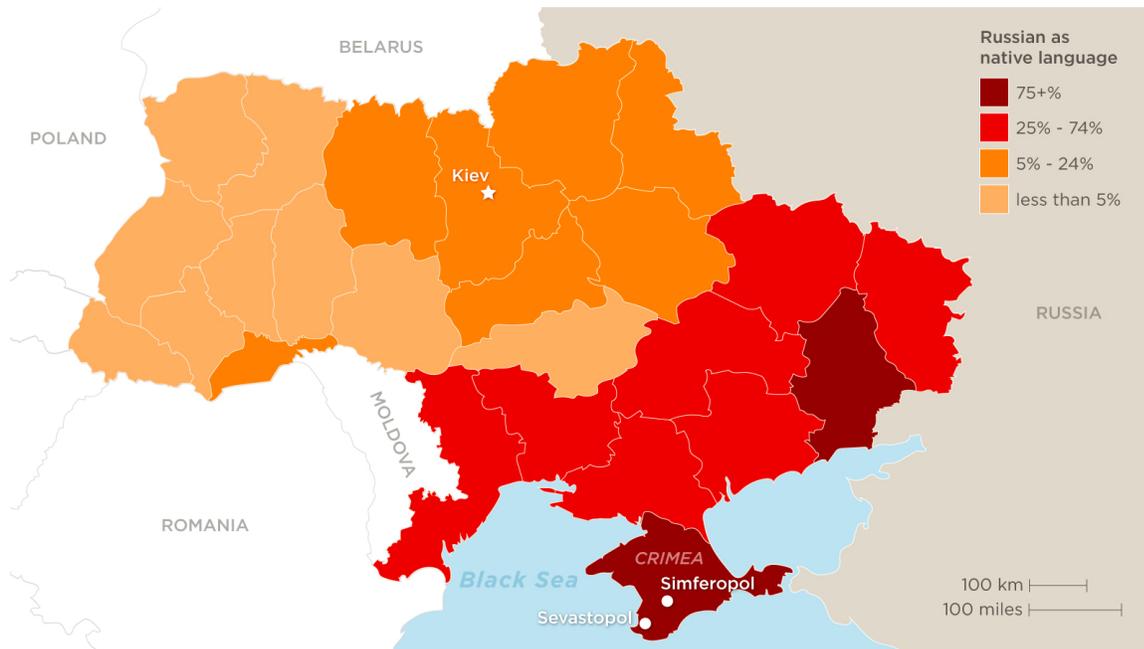
Why does Russia care so much?

Why does the United States care what's happening in, say, Mexico? Pretty much the same reasons apply -- the two countries have traded territories back and forth, they have a shared border and there are lots of business and cultural associations. Ukraine is literally on Russia's doorstep. It's home to the country's Black Sea naval fleet. Ukraine used to be one of the republics in the Soviet Union, and Crimea used to belong to Russia. The countries are big trading partners, and Ukraine hosts part of Russian state-owned natural gas provider Gazprom's network of pipelines that serve European markets.

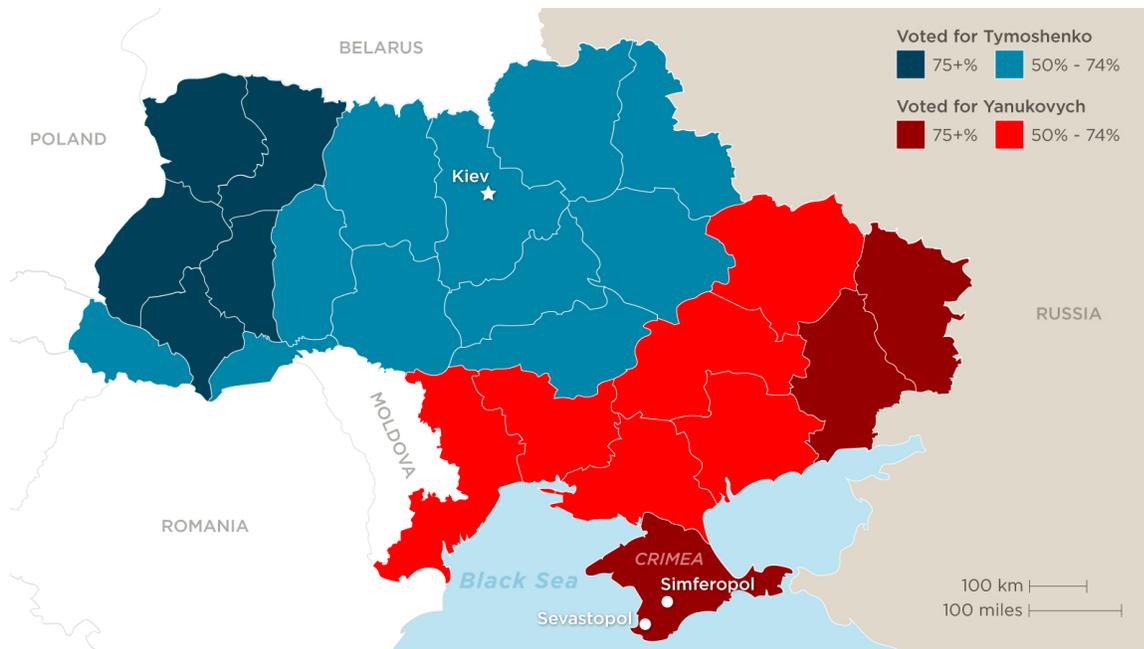
What's going to happen next?

Who knows, but keep an eye on Crimea. Pro-Russian forces still hold several government buildings, and lawmakers there have voted out a government they saw as too pro-Kiev. With so many ethnic Russians and a big Russian military presence there, it's a potential flashpoint.

The maps below show a couple of ways in which Ukraine is divided:



Language differences by region



Voting patterns in Ukraine

Possible responses:

- Choose a passage and respond to it.
- Do additional reading on the unrest. Share what you learn.
- Look at the maps and reflect. What do they say? What do they not say? How might the language and voting powers factor into the developments in Ukraine?